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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001831

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU 5TH BRIGADE OPERATIONS: A STEP FORWARD

REF: KINSHASA 1814

Classified By: Ambassador Roger Meece. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) Reftel reported a new military operation launched October 31 in North Kivu province in the area in and around Virunga Park, primarily targeting rebellious Mai Mai units and Rwandan FDLR. The operation is significant in that it represents the first involving a FARDC integrated brigade in either North or South Kivu, the first ostensibly led by FARDC units (with MONUC support), and the first FARDC/MONUC coordinated operation of significant scale in North Kivu targeting "negative forces." As such, therefore, it is a welcome development and represents the kind of operation the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) and others have long been encouraging in the Kivu provinces. It is our understanding that MONUC, specifically the North Kivu MONUC Indian Brigade, provided the new FARDC 5th Integrated Brigade with additional training in preparation for this operation, complementing Brigade training received as part of the transition military integration process. We are informed that the general plan is to leave elements of the 5th Brigade stationed in the cleared area(s) to block reuse of the area by negative forces in the future following the planned two-week operation. The operation enjoys the apparent support of Governor Serufuli, a kingpin in any developments in North Kivu province.

2. (C) This operation has its limits, however. Even if the 5th Integrated Brigade has better military combat capability than non-integrated FARDC units, it is clear that the FARDC has clear limits in what it can do. It is a given that the FARDC needs substantial external logistics support to sustain any kind of operation, and information regarding the North Kivu operation confirms that MONUC is providing major support to the FARDC brigade. It is a safe assumption that MONUC also was heavily involved, if not taking the lead, in doing the operational planning. It is also the 5th Brigade's first exposure to active operations. Primarily composed of former MLC, RCD-Goma, and "ex-government" forces, the current operation is a testing ground for how well the new integrated force can function.

3. (C) In theory, the GDRC and the FARDC have unlimited authority within Congolese territory. In other words, the FARDC has full authority to engage hostile forces, drive foreign forces (i.e., FDLR) across the border, or forcibly disarm anyone the Brigade encounters. The Eighth Military District Commander, General Amisi, announced that the intent of the operation is to "evict negative forces" from the operation area. In practice, we think the net effect, certainly in this initial operation, may be less than these facts suggest. Given the newness of the Brigade, the limitations of FARDC capabilities, and the pattern in South Kivu of FDLR militia avoiding open confrontations with coordinated MONUC/FARDC forces, we doubt we will see major combat, at least initially, nor large numbers of disarmed hostiles. Thus far, we understand that roughly 12 or so FDLR prisoners have been captured, and we have no reports of casualties at this point which would tend to reinforce this impression. (Note: There have been a number of Mai Mai and some FARDC troops reported killed in a nearby operation that freed some kidnapped Election Commission workers, being reported septel. It should also be noted that there is often a lag in receipt of casualty figures in Kinshasa. End note).

4. (C) Some FDLR prisoners captured last week in South Kivu were turned over to MONUC for DDRRR processing, i.e., voluntary repatriation. We understand that the FDLR captured in North Kivu will be similarly processed. The South Kivu FDLR, however, reportedly refused to return to Rwanda and were thus given back to the FARDC. Similar results may be seen with FDLR prisoners captured in North Kivu. It is not yet clear what the GDRC will do with its FDLR prisoners who resist repatriation. Forcible repatriation is an option for the Congolese, but they may opt to try to use the prisoners for some kind of negotiations, seek resettlement in a third country, or simply hold the prisoners indefinitely, although limited GDRC resources would make this problematic. Given the diffuse nature of Transition government authority, the GDRC is likely to find it difficult to reach a decision what to do with those refusing repatriation, and we doubt any firm decisions have been taken yet.

5. (C) Initial reports suggest that FDLR and/or Mai Mai forces are generally retreating in front of the FARDC force,

with conflicting reports as to the direction retreating forces are taking. Rumors are rampant in Goma that the renewed military operations represent new activity by dissident (and wanted) General Nkunda, provoking increasing tension and fear. In fact, Nkunda although likely in North Kivu, does not seem at this point to be a factor, and we do not believe he has much of a force available to him even if he desired to be involved.

16. (C) We believe that this operation probably represents the first in a series to be coordinated with MONUC, similar to patterns seen in MONUC-led activities in Ituri District and South Kivu. The ideal scenario would be that the 5th Integrated Brigade forces become more aggressive and effective as they gain experience and confidence, making significant inroads against FDLR and other negative forces in the province. We believe more likely, however, at least in the short to medium term, a disruption of heretofore reasonably secure logistics and base structures utilized by negative forces, with neither large-scale casualties nor large numbers of captured prisoners, especially if the FDLR and/or Mai Mai avoid open confrontations. Deployment of 5th Brigade elements will also probably preclude a normal undisturbed use of cleared territory by negative forces, but given the size of the territory (note: North Kivu is about the size of Rwanda and Burundi combined) and FARDC limitations, we believe it unrealistic to believe that a total denial of use of these zones by FDLR or other negative forces can be achieved, at least in the short-term or absent additional capable forces. It is also conceivable that FDLR or Mai Mai could launch raids in the area against the civilian population in retaliation for the new operations targeting them, which is a long-standing problem in the region.

17. (C) The problem of confronting Rwandan Hutu extremists in eastern DRC has been around since 1994 without any adequate solution. While the number of ex-FAR/Interahamwe/FDLR combatants is certainly reduced from that of the late 1990s, they still represent a significant force, with total combatant strength in the two Kivus generally estimated at around 8 - 10 thousand. The new 5th Integrated Brigade operation does not represent a definitive solution to the problem. Clearly, the Brigade bolstered by a capable African or other force working in tandem would substantially add to the military pressure being exerted on negative forces in the area. The new operation, however, does represent a qualitatively new and needed element, a start to adding a FARDC capability to the region that was previously lacking. It does step up the pressure, but is unlikely to be sufficiently compelling to produce a "tipping point" leading to large-scale FDLR disarmament or repatriations, at least in the near-term. More deployments of integrated Brigades to North and South Kivu as well as Ituri District, a part of the strategic integration plan, will obviously further add to the pressure and options available. We will continue to press, along with international partners who are financing and conducting FARDC integration training and equipment programs, for further timely progress. This is, however, not a short-term, nor a quick and cheap process.

18. (C) The Embassy will continue to monitor closely and report developments in the North Kivu operation and in the eastern region, and will provide updated analysis as appropriate.

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